



## Ferment in the Caribbean

By Norman Gall

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Santo Domingo

Grudges, both ancient and new, have dominated the first three months of the Dominican Republic's new democratic regime. The recent Haitian crisis, during which President Juan Bosch issued a call to the colors and thereby lengthened his souring inaugural honeymoon, was but another act in an old drama of recrimination which could sweep from the boards Bosch's electoral promises of social and economic advances.

Bosch may have promised too much. But it is certainly to the credit of this 53 year-old Catalonian immigrant's son that he has at least brought the Dominican peasant into politics. He did so through a highly unorthodox election campaign of unannounced visits to virtually every slatternly settlement in the Dominican countryside, touring in work pants and an open shirt. His 15-minute rallies were full of promises of cooperative stores, agrarian reform and improved education and health facilities, as well as denunciations of the oligarchical *tutumpotes* (the rich) and the *blanquitos* (little whites). His radio broadcasts were heard twice a day in the countryside on cheap Japanese transistor radios distributed for political purposes. "Sure, Bosch promises big things," one of Trujillo's former sugar cane serfs told me during the campaign. "He may not keep his promises but at least he makes them. Nobody else does that."

A shrewd, high-strung, imaginative politician, Bosch has shown himself well-schooled in the arts of brinkmanship. Three days before the December 20 general election, the nation's first free balloting since 1924, Bosch and his Dominican Revolutionary party (DRP) announced they were withdrawing from the contest because of a Spanish Jesuit priest's charge, transmitted by the Catholic radio and press, that Bosch was a "Marxist-Leninist." On the following night, Bosch engaged the bespectacled cleric, a man named Father Lautico Garcia, in a nation-wide radio-television debate. He deferentially questioned the priest as to the basis of his accusation, and so effectively routed him during a lengthy cross-examination that he was clearly back in the race the next morning. Bosch and the DRP won 62 per cent of the vote, more than twice that of any other of the five participating parties.

What can reasonably be expected of the first freely elected Government since 1924 in this predominantly peasant nation (70 per cent rural, 60 per cent illiterate) whose basic political heritage is one of military dictatorship? Its traditional governing class wallowed through 43 presidents and 56 revolutions in the seven decades before the U.S. Marine occupation (1916-24) and, by virtue of the ferocity of its attacks on the present Government, apparently has not abandoned the belief that elections are mere episodes in the evolution of conspiracy. With the possibility of a riot or a coup never to be discarded, Dominican politics remains a species of perpetual psychological warfare whose outcome is frequently arbitrated by the American Embassy.

In reckoning the future of the Bosch regime, it must be remembered that the era of Rafael Trujillo ended on May 30, 1961, in an assassination which U.S. diplomats helped to organize and for which the Central Intelligence Agency supplied arms. From that point on,

insistent U.S. diplomacy, at times backed with shows of military force, worked inexorably toward ousting the Trujillo family, establishing a provisional government and holding the elections which Bosch won. At present, too, there are 140 Peace Corps volunteers performing drastically needed functions in the Dominican Republic, mainly in rural areas, and some 50 AID technicians working in key ministries.

In other words, if Bosch is to survive through his four-year term, it cannot be done without strong U.S. backing. Should this support be lacking, the defeated conservative opposition would find the Army a natural ally in the climate of recrimination growing here. Meanwhile, Bosch and his party cannot hope to build up any sort of lasting strength among the peasantry without a successful agrarian reform program, and that can take years. So far, strong backing has been forthcoming from U.S. Ambassador John Bartlow Martin, who has been coldly rejecting the intimations of opposition politicians that Bosch is anti-American or pro-Communist.

To be sure, Bosch has given the opposition things to talk about. He began his Presidency with a few wild punches at the Esso Standard Oil Company — which in mid-1962 signed a contract to build a Santo Domingo oil refinery — and the announcement of a \$150 million credit line with a European consortium for a series of major public works. Under State Department pressure, Esso backed out of the refinery deal to avoid political complications over a franchise granted a few weeks before the Trujillos left the country. Bosch negotiated the European short-term, high-interest money on a five-week pre-inaugural tour of the Continent because, as he put it, Alliance for Progress funds would be too stow in coming to create the large-scale employment which the country desperately needs. This has become a talking point for the opposition, who will not let the Spanish Jesuit's "Marxist-Leninist" accusation die quietly.

But the central political issue in the Dominican Republic today is not the *de facto* United States political protectorate, nor Communism, nor agrarian reform (which mainly involves confiscated Trujillo properties and enjoys immense popular support). It is whether the ascendant *petit bourgeois*, which under Trujillo's patronage came to rival the economic and political power of the traditional aristocracy, is strong enough to govern. The *segundas*, those sons of rural schoolteachers and small-town storekeepers and minor government officials, followed Trujillo and advanced their fortunes as the Dominican economy expanded. In the recent election they largely sided with Bosch for fear of a "de-Trujilloization" campaign launched by the conservative National Civic Union, the aristocratic party which threatened all who had gained through Trujillo's rule.

The country is now being run by a group of half-educated, unsure, fearful men — chiefly provincial lawyers and long-exiled merchants — whose political experience has been conditioned either by the thorough corruption of the Trujillo regime or the perpetual jealousy and jockeying of splintered exile groups in San Juan, Caracas, Havana, New York and Miami. These men are serving a Government exposed to charges of speculation, incompetence and Communist intrigue, as well as to attacks from the church, the military and the mob. Their government is committed to big promises to the intensely impatient poor, yet it must rule responsibly enough to retain the backing of the American Ambassador. Considering all this, it is difficult to be optimistic about the prospects for stability in the Dominican Republic.

Bosch's basic campaign pledge was for an agrarian reform program which by 1966 would provide 70,000 peasant families with farms of roughly 17 acres each. Yet half that many settlements would be a formidable achievement, and, if done right, politically sufficient. The DRP's target is to provide a \$ 100-a-month farm income for each resettled family, about five times the present earnings of most. With world sugar prices skyrocketing, Bosch talks of land redistribution and agricultural diversification without sacrifice of productivity.

Still, it is difficult to forget that next door Bosch has the example. of Haiti as the world's most distressing instance of a disastrous agrarian revolution. In a series of early 19th century

revolutions, Haiti's Negro slaves seized and divided the great French plantations, converting them to uneconomical farms on which they reverted to African agricultural techniques to practice subsistence farming. For lack of strong central authority to maintain it, the complex and fruitful French irrigation system broke down. This led to the soil exhaustion and utter confusion of land titles which exist today. U.S. AID agricultural technicians now warn that, with the Dominican Republic's population growing from 3-4 per cent annually, an indiscriminate land distribution — such as occurred in Haiti, and 10 years ago in Bolivia — without economic planning, technical instruction or well-defined land titles, would bring similar chaos and deterioration to the Dominican countryside.

With the temperature of political squabbles rising in Santo Domingo, the crisis with Haiti over the violation of the Dominican embassy in Port-au-Prince and an alleged assassination plot against Bosch proved a convenient diversion. War talk prospered in Santo Domingo for two weeks. Bosch's popularity rose sharply again at the prospect of a brief walk by Trujillo's well-trained, well-equipped army into the Haitian capital, only 30 miles from the border dividing Hispaniola's traditional enemies, who share a long history of mutual marauding, slaughter and conquest.

There were daily talks at the Presidential Palace between Bosch and U.S. Ambassador Martin, who denied reports that he had dissuaded the President from invading Haiti. The final phase of Haitian President François Duvalier's pre-inaugural celebration — based on a fictitious 1961 "re-election" in which his name was surreptitiously placed on all ballots in a Congressional election — saw the U.S. State Department try to fake the dictator out of office with words and deeds aimed at showing that his regime was "crumbling," that he was about to flee to Curaçao, New York and Paris, and that American citizens were being evacuated because of the "explosive" situation in Port-au-Prince. Newsmen returning from Haiti, however, reported Duvalier in full control, notwithstanding contrary indications supplied by the U.S. embassy and the offshore presence of U.S. Marines.

The last big gesture of resistance to Duvalier's unconstitutional second term came two nights before his May 22 inauguration. At that time, bombs were hurled into the courtyards of three Port-au-Prince schools, killing six peasants among the 15,000 who were brought in from the countryside in trucks and corraled for the night in various public places.

Trucking in peasants to the capital for such celebrations is an old Caribbean political custom. Often these country people, rounded up with efficiency and swiftness by Government shepherds, are left, after their cheers are spent, to find their way back to their villages on foot. This is a very long walk. In Haiti it is made over dried, eroded, countryside, past waterless river beds and parched hillsides where only sisal is cultivated, into African-style kraals of sagging whitewashed mud huts with flimsy wood fences containing a few goats or pigs within a bald and dusty clearing.

From Santo Domingo the walk is not so dismal, but it is a walk into the 18th century nevertheless. For Dominican rural society is still organized much as the Spaniards left it, and the Dominican peasant is still a blunt instrument of hacienda agriculture. The land is greener than in Haiti, with prospering, well-watered plantations of sugar, coffee and cacao (once Trujillo lands now owned by the Government), with fewer people to support and with huts of wood instead of mud, and not infrequently with a man-made floor and a larger plot for subsistence farming. The poor Haitian, with his dance-like walk, carries himself with greater style, but it is the Dominican who has water — and hope.